



In Hill carried  
riches that lay in  
full view of the  
sky

"Nice girl, and I'll go out and have a cigarette."

"You are going to—"

"What, clean up the mess outside? No, we'll leave that for the present. Now, don't be scared, there's a sweet-heart. But, to tell the truth, those drums interest me. The natives signal through the bush with them, you know, in a sort of dot-dash-dot style; and so far their local Morse alphabet has been a bit beyond me. Perhaps White-Man's-Trouble may be able to decipher it. Now, don't you try and shirk that dusting one moment longer."

He went out then onto the veranda, shutting the door behind him, and questioned the Krooboy sharply about the drumming. Did he understand them?

"Savvy plenty," said White-Man's-Trouble gloomily. "Dem Okky-man's drums."

"Well, I didn't suppose it was a Chinaman's, you patent idiot. You fit for understand dem tune?"

"Savvy plenty, Dem tune say Okky-men fit for make custom."

"That means 'ceremony,' I suppose. Now, what sort of a ceremony will suit the occasion? Dirge of defeat by the ju-ju men, presumably, and then they'll crucify some wretched slave so that his spirit can go into the Beyond and arrange to have the luck changed. I wish Mr. Smith were here, or Slade. No, I'm hanged if I do, though. I've worked this thing off my own bat so far, and I'll see it onto the finish. Dem Okky-men make crucify palaver?" he asked, and translated the hard word by standing up himself spread-eagled against the factory wall.

White-Man's-Trouble nodded a dismal assent. "Then, by an' by, they grow plenty-too-much more brave, an' they come back one-time an' fight some more."

"Then you bet your woolly whiskers it won't do for us to sit quietly taking the air here. Ju-ju's the correct card to play in this country anyway."

The Krooboy shivered. "Oh, Carter, I no fit for touch ju-ju."

"Well, I am. With thought and care, I believe I should develop into a very good ju-ju practitioner. Besides, the subject fascinates me. No white men seem to know anything very definite about it, above the fact that it is beyond their comprehension, and it would be rather fine, if the unlikely happened, and one chanced to survive, to be known as the one authority on West African magic."

"Oh, Carter, if you meddle with dem ju-ju palaver you lib for die plenty soon. If you walk in bush, tree fall on you; if you ride in canoe, arrow jump on you; if you chop, dem chop he fill with powdered glass, and presently you lib for die of tear-tear-belly. Oh, Carter, you lib for Coast now one year; I lib for Coast all my life. I savvy plenty; you alle-same damfool."

"My dear Trouble, I've admitted already that I know meddling with ju-ju isn't altogether an insurance proposition. Much obliged to you for the fresh warning all the same. But I'm afraid your constitutional nervousness rather clouds that massive brain of yours at times, or you'd see that Smooth River factory and its three occupants are in the devil of a fix just now. You say the Okky-men when they're rubbed up their courage will presently return; and I don't dispute your reading of the omens. If they do come, we can't shoot them off, and that's a certain thing. As I'm sure Mr. Smith would say, it's a case of Aut-ju-ju aut nullus, and to follow his rather objectionable knack of translating for a man who happened to have been at a different school to his own, that means, we've either got to play the ju-ju card or be scuppered. White-

Man's-Trouble, you are hereby made conjurer's confederate."

"I no fit."

"Am I to hurt your feelings with this piece of packing-case lid?"

"Oh, Carter, you look see. There's a nail in him there."

"I know there's nail in it. The occasion demands a nail, and I picked the weapon for that reason. Now, then, are you going to obey orders, or will you take a first-class licking?"

"Oh, Carter, I fitter do what you say."

"Good. You're an excellent boy when you're handled the right way. Now go to the feteash and bring the biggest coil of that inch lead piping you can stagger under."

Carter himself went to Slade's room and brought from there one of those crude carved wooden figures which the natives make and the traders pick up as curiosities. At home they are sold for stiff prices as the gods of the heathen; but the negroes that make them are not idolaters, and what they knoweth not save only that they are not articles of worship. Locally they come under that all-embracing term ju-ju, which includes so much and explains so little.

Carter found a brace and bit—an inch twist bit, which for a wonder was in a calabash of yellow palm oil, and so not rusty—and he worked on these carved men till the sweat ran from his forehead. Laura came out and told him that he was inviting an attack of fever, which was obvious, since by then it was high noon, and violent exertion for a white man with the thermometer above par always has to be paid for on the Coast. But he drove her back again into the house and out of the heat with a volley of chaff, and went gaspingly on with his tremendous work.

The mouths of the figures were wide, but with knife and drill he slayed them wider, but was careful always not to distort them beyond the canons of local art; and in a couple of hours' time he was ready for White-Man's-Trouble and the heavy coils of lead piping.

"Regard," he said, "O thou assistant to the great white ju-ju man. We will place one of these graven images opposite the entrance of each road which comes from the bush into this factory clearing. We'll hoist it up onto a green gin box, so, and give it a bit more height and dignity. And we'll add a necklace of these green cigarette tins, which have already advertised themselves into an ugly notoriety. Then, into this hole you see in the back of each image, we will fit an end of lead piping, and as the holes are tapered, the unions will make themselves good. Then, O helper of dark schemes, we'll pay out the coil as far as possible in swamp where it will sink out of sight, and bring all the ends into the house here. Any piping that shows, you must throw earth over. Savvy? And the inside ends we'll splay out with this hard-wood cone that I've made, till a man can get his mouth well into them and shout down the tube comfortably. I'm sure you catch the idea?"

"Oh, Carter, I plenty-too-much afraid. Presently I lib for die."

"Not you. If I see any signs of your starting to fade away, I'll whack you into life again with a piece of board with two nails in it. Wherefore, O feared of the unintelligible, buck up, and get a shovel, and cover that lead out of sight where it shows. Afterwards I'll show you the working of that early British contrivance, an office sneaking-tube. That is, if we have time for a rehearsal, but by the extra bid dot-dash-dot of those monkey-skin drums just now, it rather looks as if we shall have the next act of this play crowding down on us without much more interval."

The burned warriors had not, it appeared, retreated very far. Their spiritual advisers, the ju-ju men, had by King Kallee's orders been waiting not very far away down the several bush roads; and when presently fugitives began to come trotting in through the steamy forest shades, these ecclesiastics rallied them, and when enough were collected, they commenced a "custom" for the renewal of the soldiers' bravery.

Savage superstitions, savage terrors, savage thrill at the raw smell of blood were all worked upon with a high dexterity. King Kallee had made a fine art of those incitements; he had gained a throne by their practice, and had handed them on to chosen ministers, who practised the cult of ju-ju with a single eye to advancing the interests of their king.

The black soldiers were wearily tired, and many of them carried wounds. They listened at first with a sullen torpor. They heard without interest that the white man's bullets were non-consecrated, and therefore the wounds they made would soon heal. They learned, with a little thrill of wonder, that the thin veneer of education poured burning flame were not true ju-ju, since the King of Kallee's ju-ju men declared them unorthodox. And by degrees their dull nerves were worked up till at the proper moment sacrifice was made, and the screams and smells of the victim maddened them. Even the Hausa officers, who were Moslem, and therefore contemptuous disbelievers in all pagan ceremony, were stirred up almost equally with their men, and when as a final exhortation they were ordered to return once more to the factory, and bring the red head and the white girl as presents for the King, they forget their qualms and their burns, and led on with a new, fierce courage.

But whether the African be savage bushmen or cultivated Moslem gentlemen, superstition is part of the very marrow in his backbone. These men had felt the bullets, they had felt the infernal burnings of the benzoline, but they were wound up now to a pitch above dreading either. Orders were given to concentrate in the edge of the bush, as near to the clearing as they could get without being sighted from the factory, and then when all was ready the monkey-skin drums would beat the charge.

The first comers peered through the outer fringe of the cover, and saw the clearing desolate, and the factory buildings to all appearance tenantless. The dead that they had left in their hurried retreat still lay where they had dropped, and glared up glassy eyes keen to pick up any hint at ju-ju charm, the gaze of all this vanguard fell on five little wooden mannikins set opposite the points where the several bush roads cut into the open.

There was nothing new about the mannikins, themselves were. They were merely the things that their own uncles and their grandfathers carved for a purpose which they themselves knew better than did that tricky white man with the red head who had doubtless put them there. But each of these mannikins was perched on a pedestal made of one or more green gin boxes, and that in itself looked suspicious—or, in other words, smacked of ju-ju. And, moreover, each was garlanded with those infernal green cylinders which they had just been informed officially were in truth not orthodox ju-ju, but which they knew from their own painful experience could, upon occasion, vomit forth the most horrible flames.

They crouched in the edge of the cover once more, then, shaken, and it only required the final portent to fray their courage utterly.

In the factory, tucked snugly out of sight in the mess-room, Laura Slade, Carter and White-Man's-Trouble lay stretched out wearily upon the floor. A length of match boarding had been stripped away from the wall, and only a paling of woven bamboos stood between them and the external world.

It was the code message of the monkey-skin drums, as read by White-Man's-Trouble, that first gave them the news that the Okky-men had returned up their courage and so they once more retired out of sight. Guns and defenders would have been a reassuring touch to the enemy, who had seen such things before. But for them to find no guns, and no human beings in view, would have accentuated the effect of the graven images which gazed woodenly upon them from the green gin-box pedestals.

For long enough they lay there in the sickly heat, staring out over the little of the morning's battlefield, which danced up and down in the shimmering sunlight. The factory hazards came out in full numbers for their daily sunbaths, and most of the flies of Africa seemed to be congregated in the clearing.

Laura caught the first note of invasion. "Do you see," she asked, "these two swallow-tailed butterflies flitting about by that big silk cottonwood that lost his top in the tornado? They were feeding contentedly enough on the stuff like meadow-sweet, but someone or something has disturbed them, and they flew up. If you notice, they dare not go back, so that rather hints that the someone is still hidden in the meadow-sweet."

"Which said clump?" observed Carter, "is that the commands bush road number three. Oh, assistant conjurer, canst thou swear?"

"Oh, Carter," said the Krooboy with simple dignity, "I no bush-boy. I speak English. I learn him on steamship. I work up to position of stand-by-at-sea boy before I lib for come ashore to work at factory. Ah, Carter, I savvy swear-palaver plenty-much-too-good. You fit for hear me?"

"Not for one instant. I want you to make all your remarks in Kroo, or preferably Okky, if you aren't too rattled to remember any of that fashionable tongue-twisting. Here, put your sweet line to the tube, and just say in the thickest language you can think of. Get away back to Okky City, you bushmen. If you hesitate, your noses shall drop off, and your great fat lips shall follow, and red ants shall snarl up out of the earth to eat them whilst you wait. Savvy, the idea?"

"Savvy plenty," said White-Man's-Trouble, and rattled venom into the tube with a savage gusto.

The result was sufficiently surprising. Spear-heads and gun-barrels bristled suddenly upwards from the clump of meadow-sweet, as ambushed Okky-men scrambled to their feet. For a full

two minutes they stood there listening to the abuse which they heard pouring from the lips of the wooden mannikins close beside them, with eyes goggling, and mouths gaping, and knees creaking, the worst scared ducks in all the Oil Rivers.

For the moment they were mesmerized by fright. But then the two mannikins which were nearest on either side began cackling with uncanny laughter, and a ju-ju man who was with them recognized an art high-stick that was native to him to rub away the thin veneer of his education. "Let us begone from here," he moaned, "even if it be to meet the curved execution axe of King Kallee in Okky City. Better the sharp edge of that, yes, better even lingering days on the crucifixion tree than the neighborhood of these devils. Wood they are now, I do believe. But they can talk as no thing of wood ever could talk; and presently they will come to life, and hurl at us those green tins of liquid fire with which they are garlanded. If they are any that wise, I see more, let them stay. For myself, I return to Okky City, even if it means impalement."

The other wooden mannikins broke out into words, and immediately the bush around each of them rippled with men. Carter, whose knowledge of the native was growing, used every syllable of his vocabulary down two tubes alternately.

Laura, who had grown up bilingual, commenced at first timidly. But the desperate peril of their surroundings, the excitement of battle, the thrill of seeing men run, the drop of negro blood that colored her veins, were all circumstances that presently whirled her into a resistless torrent of words. Never had she spoken with such a fluency; never had she framed such sentences. It was all in the Okky tongue, accurate, biting, telling. Carter broke off from his own halting speech to listen. He could not speak the language yet with any great ease, but he could understand almost every word. He chilled as he listened to her. He coughed a warning. He called sharply that she should stop. But that drop of negro blood held her to her speech. The Krooboy, thoroughly warned up to his work, was yelling infamously down a tube at the other end of the mess-room. Laura, with eyes glittering and hands clinched, was growing almost beside herself with speech. . . . Carter gripped her arm and plucked her almost savagely away.

"You had better shut up. The Okky men have gone, minutes ago, and I do not think you know what you are saying. Laura, do you hear me?"

She stared at him, and then spoke with a dry throat. "I said only what you told me. It was to save our lives. And you—you could not understand what I said. It was Okky talk; you surely could not follow it. Why do you look at me like that? George, what is it?" She laughed rather wildly, and plucked herself away from him. "Oh, I see. Well, I warned you before that I was black, and now I suppose you believe me."

He returned her look steadily enough. "My dear girl, you've gone through more than you can stand, and you've just worn yourself to rags. I never quite knew what hysterics meant before, but I fancy that in about two minutes more you would show me. Now the trouble's over; we've fixed 'em tight this time, and you needn't worry yourself any more. Just you go to your room and lie down and sleep."

"Sleep? You think I could sleep?"

"Very well," he said coolly, "then Trouble and I must wait till you can. But please understand, my sweetheart, that until you have put in a four-hours' spell of sleep, and can get up rested to stand a watch, neither the boy nor I must close an eye. So you see it's up to you to arrange whether we shall all have a dose of overwork or not."

She came to him and laid her slim brown hands on his shoulders and looked him in the face. There were black rings under her eyes, and her cheeks were white and drawn, but somehow with her delicious curves she appealed to him more than ever, and he let her see it in his glance. "You still call me by that name," she said, "you still call me sweet-heart even after what you have seen and heard?"

"Of course. Don't be stupid. A man doesn't change towards a girl just because she happened to get a bit excited when she was doing her best to save his life. I'm half sorry now I stopped you, only the myriads of my rival, his Majesty of Okky, had run away, and you really were rather working yourself up." He drew her to him and kissed her up to the forehead. "And now you will go and turn in won't you, like a good girl?"

"Will do anything my lord wishes. But you will look after yourself, promise me?"

"Rather."

"Let your boy get you a meal. You've not had a crumb all day, and you must be starving. It was horribly careless of me not to have thought of it before."

"That is rather a bright idea. Had anything yourself? No, I see you haven't. Well, we'll sup, Laura, before you're packed off to bed. It's five o'clock in the afternoon, but we'll call it supper. Trouble?"

"Oh, Carter?"

"We fit for chop. You kill two tin one-time."

"Oh, Carter, three tin. Me one, Missy two."

But went a grin, as it seemed to their jarred nerves, close at their elbows. They all started violently, and the girl clutched convulsively at Carter's sleeve.

"Dem Okky cannon," wailed the Krooboy, and burrowed forthwith into the case-mate of the beddine.

"Not it," said Carter. "It's all right, Laura. It's a steamer's mail gun. I never heard the roar of a loaded cannon till this morning, but once you've you can't mistake it for blank cartridge."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. I jumped when the thing went off, but then I suppose we're all a bit fagged. Here, Trouble, you shirker, get them chop one-time, and then find some limes. We shall have the steamer people ashore in ten minutes, and when they hear the varn they'll want about five cocktails apiece to congratulate us in. Lord! Laura, but I'd give a tooth and two finger nails to have Mr. K. dropping in on us during the next hour or so to see the fine way we've saved O'Neil and Craven's factory from a total loss. I believe he'd raise my screw with such a jump that you and I might get

\*In West Coast English to chop is to take food. Chop is food.